

**IN THE CLAIMS**

Amend the claims as follows.

Claims 1-22 (Canceled).

23. (new) An isolated HCV E1 envelope peptide as defined by any of SEQ ID Nos:1-16 and 37.

✓

24. (new) An isolated HCV E1 envelope peptide consisting of up to 45 contiguous amino acids wherein an amino acid sequence selected from SEQ ID Nos:1-16 and 37 is present in said peptide.

✓

25. (new) An isolated peptide selected from the group consisting of:

- a peptide of 21 to 23 contiguous amino acids of SEQ ID NO:6;
- a peptide of 21 to 28 contiguous amino acids of SEQ ID NO:10;
- a peptide of 21 to 30 contiguous amino acids of SEQ ID NO:13;
- a peptide of 21 to 33 contiguous amino acids of SEQ ID NO:11 or 15;
- a peptide of 21 to 34 contiguous amino acids of SEQ ID NOs:1-5 or 7-9;
- a peptide of 21 to 35 contiguous amino acids of SEQ ID NO:12;
- a peptide of 21 to 39 contiguous amino acids of SEQ ID NO:14 or 37;
- a peptide of 21 to 40 contiguous amino acids of SEQ ID NO:16.

26. (new) A peptide of more than 20 contiguous amino acids derived from the E2 envelope region of HCV-related viruses which binds and recognizes anti-HCV-related virus antibodies.

27. (new) A peptide which binds and recognizes an anti-HCV-related virus antibody present in a sample of body fluid and which is chosen with said peptide being selected from the group consisting of the sequences as represented by SEQ ID NO:17-36.

28. (new) A method of immunizing a human against infection with HCV-related virus or any mutated strain thereof, comprising administering to said human at least one peptide according to any one of claims 23 to 27.

29. (new) An assay kit for detecting the presence of anti-HCV-related virus antibodies within a sample of body fluid comprising:

optionally, a solid support,

at least one peptide according to any one of claims 23 to 27, and

optionally, markers which allow detection of complexes formed between anti-HCV-related virus antibodies within a sample of body fluid with said at least one peptide.

30. (new) A bioassay for identifying a compounds which modulate the interaction between a peptide according to any one of claims 23 to 27 and an anti-HCV-related virus antibody, said bioassay comprising

- (i) contacting said peptide with said anti-HCV-related virus antibody;
- (ii) after (i), determining the binding between said peptide and said anti-HCV-related virus antibody;
- (iii) adding said compound or a combination of said compounds to the peptide-antibody complex formed in (i);
- (iv) after (iii), determining the binding between said peptide and said anti-HCV-related virus antibody; and
- (v) inferring, from (ii) and (iv) the modulation of binding between said peptide and said anti-HCV-related virus antibody by said added compound or said added combination of compounds.

31. (new) A bioassay for identifying a compounds which modulate the interaction between a peptide according to any one of claims 23 to 27 and an anti-HCV-related virus antibody, said bioassay comprising

- (i) determining the binding between said peptide and said anti-HCV-related virus antibody;
- (ii) contacting said peptide with said compound;
- (iii) adding said anti-HCV-related virus antibody to the peptide-compound complex formed in (ii);

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(iv) after (iii), determining the binding between said peptide and said compound;

(v) inferring, from (i) and (iv) the modulation of binding between said peptide and said anti-HCV-related virus antibody by said compound.